

# HERE'S *my* STORY

## "NAME HIM YOSEF YITZCHAK"

DR. YECHIEL LASRI

**M**y family immigrated to Israel from Ksar Souk, Morocco. We are Sephardi Jews of rich ancestry and this is why, when I was about ten, I began to wonder about an unusual picture that would hang on the wall of our home. Our Sephardi neighbors typically decorated their walls with portraits of Sephardi *tzadikim* — usually arrayed in turbans and robes — but we had a picture of a bearded man in a black hat, a suit, and a tie.

One time, I asked my mother about him, and she told me this story:

She told me that many years earlier, this was in the early 1950s, after the birth of my older brother Shmuel and sister Simcha, she became pregnant again. It was a normal pregnancy, nine months, and a normal birth in the local hospital. But a half-hour after the birth, the baby died.

When this happened the first time, the family was very upset, of course. When it happened a second time, they were shocked. But when it happened a third time, they began to panic.

And then, my mother became pregnant again. During the pregnancy, she consulted with specialists and with rabbis. The doctors said that there was no health problem — that this pregnancy was completely normal, just as the others had been, and that they had no idea at all what could be wrong. Then one of the rabbis in our city, Rabbi Rachamim Lasri — a relative of our family from whom I also learned *aleph beis* in school before I immigrated to Israel — suggested that she turn to the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

At that time the Rebbe's name was famous throughout Morocco because of the emissaries he had sent, some of whom our family was acquainted with. So, it was decided that Rabbi Lasri should write to the Rebbe.



My mother told me that Rabbi Lasri took this very seriously — he first immersed in the *mikveh* and then he sat down to write a letter to the Rebbe, relating our family's story.

Shortly after, there came a response. The Rebbe said that the *mezuzah* of the house as well as my father's *tefillin*, should be checked to assure that they are kosher. Whatever is wrong with them should be fixed, my parents should give charity, and with G-d's help, everything will turn out well, and a boy will be born. He only made one small request: "If possible, could the child be named after my father-in-law, the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak."

Of course, the Rebbe's response was greeted with great joy. The *mezuzah* of the house was checked and, indeed, it needed to be fixed, as did my father's *tefillin*, and everyone hoped for the best.

This time, the pregnancy ended well. A healthy baby boy was born on August 21, 1957, and he survived.

But when it came to naming the baby, the family faced a

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dilemma that they hadn't foreseen: There had been a highly revered rabbi in our city — Rabbi Yechiel Dahan, and my mother's best friend had dreamt about him. In the dream, she saw him coming to my mother and putting a son into her arms. Everyone considered this to be a sign from above and many in the family thought the child should be named Yechiel after Rabbi Dahan.

Things got even more complicated when my father revealed that he had committed to name the baby Shimon after Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. My father was a member of a group which would study the Zohar every night after the evening prayers. Some years before, my father had resolved that



Yosef Yitzchak Lasri

if he would have a normal, healthy boy, he would name him after the Zohar's author.

After much debate — whether to name the baby after Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, after Rabbi Yechiel Dahan, or after Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai — a conclusion was reached. The honor of the local community was paramount, so I was named Yechiel Shimon.

The family wrote to the Rebbe to explain, and his response was: "You did the right thing to honor your community. G-d willing, you will have another son, and I ask that you name him Yosef Yitzchak."

Indeed, two years later, my younger brother was born, and he was named Yosef Yitzchak.

This is the story my mother told me when I asked about the unusual picture on the wall of our house — the picture of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. My mother now lives in Ashdod, Israel, and to this day the Rebbe's picture hangs proudly in her living room.

*Dr. Yechiel Lasri is an Israeli physician and politician, who currently serves as the mayor of Ashdod, Israel. He was interviewed in November, 2011. His story is featured on the new JEM video, "A Glimpse Behind the Veil, Volume 2."*

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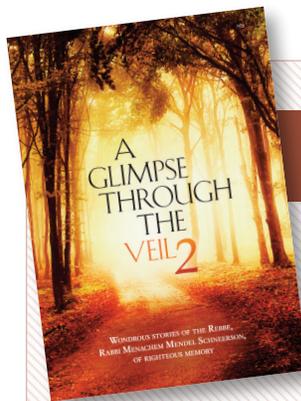
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ע"י בניהם ר' נחמן ור' אברהם ומשפחתם שיחיו

## This week in...

- > **5665 — 1904**, the Rebbe's younger brother, Dovber, was born in Nikolaev, Ukraine. 3 Kislev
- > **5739 — 1978**, the Rebbe visited the art gallery of Israeli artist Baruch Nachshon held near 770, spending 45 minutes viewing and commenting on many of the paintings. The Rebbe had previously encouraged Nachson to hold a gallery in New York showcasing some of his work.<sup>2</sup> 6 Kislev
- > **5748 — 1987**, the annual Conference of Shluchim — which had included only US Shluchim, became the 'International Conference of Shluchim,' to include Shluchim from the entire world. During the Rebbe's *farbrengen* that Shabbos, he devoted the first three talks to the Shluchim, showering them with blessings and offering to alleviate ten percent of their deficit, and to lend them an additional forty-five percent of their remaining debts.<sup>1</sup> 29 Cheshvan

1. Hisvaaduyos 5748 Vol. 1, p. 498-515 2. Sichos Kodosh 5739 Vol. 1, p. 718



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